

September 2003

## ATG Interviews Rolf A. Janke

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### Recommended Citation

Gilson, Thomas (2003) "ATG Interviews Rolf A. Janke," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 15: Iss. 4, Article 17.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4484>

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by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Robert Scott Small Library, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29424; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

**ATG:** *A couple of years ago, Sage Publications made, what some might consider, a bold move. You started a new imprint, Sage Reference. How did a publisher known for quality journals and books decide to get into reference publishing?*

**RJ:** In the 1990's, the Sage book program had experienced a decline in revenue generated from the declining markets for monographs so we needed to identify new products that would fit our strategy and would preserve the Sage brand. We had already started to publish textbooks but the only reference products of significance were our handbooks. And, at that time, our journals program was as strong as ever which meant we were no strangers to the academic library market. The final piece of the puzzle was my experience from **Blackwell Publishers** and **ABC-CLIO** where encyclopedia publishing was prosperous. So, we decided that the book-publishing program should include encyclopedias.

But the "bold move" came when we created **Sage Reference**, which would be a dedicated imprint for publishing encyclopedias in the Social Sciences for academic and public libraries. The Sage brand is very strong in the library market and as long as we adhered to the same quality that Sage has always delivered, we knew that our chances were good — yes, even in a time when library budgets are declining. However, we had so many reference librarians tell us that even with shrinking budgets, they always try to keep their collections current so we knew that if we put the right plan in motion, **Sage Reference** could make an impact.

**ATG:** *It's been a while since you took the plunge, how is it working out?*



**RJ:** Great! We launched four titles last year, three of which were in the criminal justice discipline. This was by design since Sage is very well known and respected for the books and journals we publish in this area. Two of the four titles, the *Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment* and the *Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, have won several awards. This year, we will launch eight titles and we have twelve scheduled for next year. Many ask us, starting so late in the game, are there any more topics that would be unique, or different enough, to capture the librarians' attention? I look at this as the ultimate challenge, selecting topics, and then watching the titles go on to be successful (or hopefully so!). We are still experiencing some growing pains, but so far the plunge has been a refreshing one!

**ATG:** *Growing pains? What type of growing pains are you referring to?*

**RJ:** Encyclopedias are more complex than a traditional monograph or even textbook when you take into consideration the number of people involved. Instead of a single authored book, we were introducing multi-volume encyclopedias that would consist of editors, editorial board members and hundreds of contributors — just on one title! Then you throw in an aggressive writing schedule, so keeping track of everybody presented some real challenges, or growing pains. We have since set up in-house developmental, while adding Web based, project management tools, so even with a small staff, we are now able to manage over forty major works.

**ATG:** *Being new in reference publishing, how have you separated yourselves from the pack? What is unique about Sage Reference?*

**RJ:** There are many established reference publishers but in order to sustain growth from a new imprint, we felt that instead of trying to differentiate ourselves from the pack, we would build upon the same strengths that have made

**Sage** so successful. An independent, higher education publisher of books, journals and electronic media in the Social Sciences that now offers encyclopedias is a great story. We are not trying to knock the big guys off. That would be a tall task, considering all the mergers and acquisitions in the industry. But, we feel that our story will entice librarians to look at what we are doing.

**ATG:** *And the unique part...?*

**RJ:** I believe the unique component of **Sage Reference** is that every title we publish has a strong interdisciplinary focus to it. The Social Sciences are made up of many disciplines and no matter what the topic, we feel that we can give the end user of our product a wider view of that particular topic. For example, in the *Encyclopedia of Community*, there are articles that fall under topics such as politics, economics, gender, race, psychology, criminal justice, health and so on. It is not possible to pull this interdisciplinary approach off on every project, but we try. So far, the response from our customers has been wonderful. They expect more usage from such a product. It also makes it easier to select topics, knowing that you can take a niche topic, health psychology, for example, and add more disciplinary perspectives and turn it into a health and behavior approach making it more resourceful to a wider audience.

**ATG:** *Has this interdisciplinary approach made it easier, or harder, to market and sell these reference works? Do they appeal as much to public libraries as they do to academic libraries?*


**RJ:** I believe it has made it easier since you can identify more of a reason one should purchase a particular work. Librarians have told us that since an interdisciplinary work would appeal to a wider audience, they would feel more compelled to purchase it. I look at it as a good "cost-benefit" for our customers. As far as appealing to public libraries? Yes, as long as the topic itself fits their needs.

**ATG:** *We know that Sage is known for its scholarly, academic content, but with reference works, value added features are important. How do you insure the necessary glossaries, chronologies, appendices and indexes are included in each of your works?*

**RJ:** We have built these components into the plan from the start. We have an excellent development staff at **Sage Reference** who works directly with the editors, making sure they realize the importance of these added value features. I study reviews of encyclopedias and notice that reviewers are very appreciative of these components so it is not that we are adding fluff, we are adding valuable additions that hopefully will be utilized by the end user. I remember when we launched the *Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment*, **Sage Reference's** first

*continued on page 70*

### Interview — Gary Shirk from page 66

**BarnesandNoble.com.** As a result, competition is no longer the primary driver when negotiating terms and conditions. Instead, we vendors find ourselves trying to hold the line on costs in the face of the growing technological and service needs of our customers. In this environment we're discovering an unlikely paradox: less, not more, competition brings greater benefits to libraries. When suppliers consolidate, they can spread the cost of maintaining knowledgeable staff, large scale databases, innovative systems, facilities, etc. across a much larger number of units. The resulting cost reduction decreases the upward pressure on prices. The US Steel industry, after two decades of consolidation, is an example of this. Only now are they beginning to be able to compete with foreign suppliers. Will our industry go the way of steel? It's something we should all ponder in quiet moments this winter. I know I will. 



title, a four-volume work. I knew it was an amazing project, but I was still very nervous about what the reviewers might think. I was then very pleased to see that in almost all the reviews, which were positive, they singled out the **Reader's Guide** (a thematic table of contents that is placed after the headword list) and commented on what a nice added value feature that was. So, when we sign up a new project, there is a built in plan to add features that have proven useful.

**ATG:** *Do you use reference librarians as consultants on your reference projects?*

**RJ:** My favorite question! When I established **Sage Reference**, I assembled what is known as the **Sage Reference Industry Board**. The Board consists of six academic and four public librarians. They represent such institutions such as **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Miami of Ohio, New York Public and Phoenix Public**. Their job is to mainly help me with macro topics, issues, concerns, but I rarely use them to comment on specific topic ideas. They have been such a great asset to the imprint and have been instrumental in steering the imprint through these first three years. They have been particularly helpful in helping us with our ad and direct mail design and content. The look and feel of our marketing was really co-developed with the Board. One member had even mentioned that **Sage Reference** should publish an *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* so I am pleased to say that we will launch just that, a two-volume work that we will publish next spring. The Board meets twice a year at the **American Library Association** meetings. Our last meeting at Midwinter in Philadelphia was a real eye opener as we discuss the implications of budget cuts and what that means for an imprint such as **Sage Reference**. Not the cheeriest of discussions but very necessary in the scheme of growing **Sage Reference**. I was most pleased last year when the two-year term was up and none of the Board Members wanted to leave. We have since decided to eliminate the term limit so that the original group can continue.

**ATG:** *That type of commitment is impressive.*

**RJ:** Yes, it is. Our Board has been great. And we have also established a Topic Selection Committee consisting of over forty reference librarians. We send them abstracts of potential topics for encyclopedias. They not only give us thumbs up or thumbs down, but have also given valuable and specific information to include in our encyclopedias. Some have even given us some ideas for products that we have since signed up!

**ATG:** *You have published a number of well-received reference sets, as well as single volume titles, in print. We may have missed it, but do you have plans for e-publishing your reference works?*

**RJ:** Yes, we do have plans to launch e-reference products next year (2004). I have been watching the e-publishing market from day one and although **Sage Reference** will not be a pio-

neer, I feel our initiatives will be attractive. Again, our Board has advised me on this subject so their input has aided our decision-making process. We know that projects like our *Encyclopedia of Terrorism* lend themselves to an e-reference product, especially if we can provide affordable updates, so this is one direction that we will go in. Next January we will also launch a multi-volume *Encyclopedia of Leadership* and since next year is an election year, we could do some attractive things with that. I still am a believer in "print will never die" but I am enjoying the prospects of our e-reference initiatives.

**ATG:** *Will you offer these titles as stand alone databases at a one-time cost? Or will you try to combine related sets into a larger database, searchable by the same search engine and sold as a subscription?*

**RJ:** We will offer titles as stand alone databases, as well as combining titles into a larger database, searchable by the same search engine. There are still questions about the merits of subscription products so we need to sort that angle out very soon. As I just mentioned, we have a very exciting major work, the *Encyclopedia of Leadership* due in January, and with 2004 as an election year, there are many possibilities for expanding the content on a frequent basis, so keep an eye out for news on that.

**ATG:** *You recently have made exclusive deals with databases like ProquestABI Inform to provide full text to a number of your journals. Are similar deals being considered for your reference titles down the road?*

**RJ:** Yes. These are more complicated deals but **Sage Reference** titles are always in the discussions. As you might know, we launched the *Sage Collections* last year which are full text


journal databases using the **Cambridge Scientific Abstracts** platform. No decisions have been made but we are looking into possibilities for the reference content there as well.

**ATG:** *If you had a crystal ball, what would reference publishing look like in five years, in ten years?*

**RJ:** Wow, always a challenging question. Five years from now? An obvious answer would be that a majority of the reference works would be digital products, delivered in many various ways. However, I think print reference will still be around for the sole purpose of longevity. With rapidly changing technology, I know some librarians feel a bit more secure buying print knowing that the content will be intact as long as the book remains on the shelf.

Ten years from now? Who knows if there will even be a classroom then but I think there will still be an important role for the library in the academic community. No matter what technology prevails, knowledge is still vital to the learning process and this knowledge has always been supported and enhanced by authoritative reference. And, it has always been and will continue to be the librarians role in collecting these resources, whether on a microchip or in print form. As a publisher, we will always have the ability to create the content so ten years from now, I'll be staring at some plasma-wired device but having the same creative discussions with an editor on what topics and added value we need to build into our next encyclopedia. And...check back with me then but hopefully our Board will hang in there for ten more!

**ATG:** *Rolf, It's been great talking to you. We appreciate you taking the time to share your insights with us.*

**RJ:** It was my pleasure. 

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## ATG Interviews Ron Boehm

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### President and CEO, ABC-CLIO

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Robert Scott Small Library, College of Charleston; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

**ATG:** *We have been hearing a lot about ABC-CLIO in the last couple of years, your eBook program, your plan to double your history reference titles, etc. But how did it all get started?*

**RB:** **ABC-CLIO** was started by my father and mother in 1953 when they began the planning for *Historical Abstracts*. They were in Vienna, Austria, where my father was stationed in the Air Force. In the late 1950s when he left the military, they moved to California and settled in Santa Barbara, which is still our publishing headquarters.

My father's interest in technology solutions to publishing problems has left an enduring legacy in the company. After seeing what publications such as *Chemical Abstracts* were doing in the early 1960s in applying information processing techniques to their content, he took on the challenge of "computerizing" *Historical Abstracts*. He managed to

accomplish this without the substantial government subsidies given to most science publishers in the post Sputnik years. This meant that when *America: History and Life* was launched in 1964, it had been designed as a database from the start. When our three A&I services (*Historical Abstracts*, *America: History and Life*, and *ArtBibliographies Modern*) went online with **DIALOG** in 1975, they were the first non-science databases available on the service.

We expanded our subscription databases in the mid-1980s at the same time as we moved into the school market. These evolved into our social studies Web services in US and world history, state and world geography, and American government.

**ATG:** *What about your history reference titles?*

**RB:** Our history reference book program started with bibliographies in the 1960s, and

*continued on page 72*